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Contact: Mark Carr

Tel: 076 515 000

U.S. Supports Elimination of Excess Weapons and Munitions

United States Ambassador Michael S. Owen and the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Sierra Leone, Rtd. Major A.P. Conteh, today viewed the final demolition exercise of a U.S.-funded program at Benguema Base to destroy weapons and munitions left over from Sierra Leone's civil war. Following the war's end in 2002, these items were collected from various militias during the disarmament process and stockpiled in depots such as Wellington Barracks. If left untended, such excess and obsolete materials would begin to degrade and pose a serious health risk to the local population.

Controlled explosions of these materials began at Benguema Base near Hastings Barracks in early October. The United States Department of State financed the demolition and DynCorps International carried out the operations. More than 2,500 weapons and 27,000 items of ordnance – ranging from rifles to rocket-propelled grenades and mortars—have been destroyed through this program. In total more than 83 net tons of ordnance were eliminated.

Ambassador Owen and Minister Conteh were joined by representatives of the Office of National Security, the Inspector General of Police, the Sierra Leone National Commission on Small Arms (SLeNCSA), and the Sierra Leone Action Network on Small Arms (SLANSA). Speaking before the demolition exercise, Ambassador Owen noted that “the symbolic importance of this program goes far beyond the weapons we have eliminated. Our presence here today is a reminder of the progress Sierra Leone has made, and the need to keep moving along the path of progress.” He also said that destroying weapons was only part of the solution, and highlighted the need to “fill young people's hands with tools, books, diplomas, and other means of waging war on poverty and injustice.”

Ambassador Owen complimented the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces for their strong collaboration, and also reaffirmed U.S. commitment to working with the people of Sierra Leone in the sectors of education, public health, agriculture, and good governance.